Court refusal to allow second opinion a weakness–prelate

Christine Newman

) final decision has been made the "irrevocable act" in the e of the 13-year-old pregnant ge victim whom the High Court s permitted to travel to England an abortion, the Archbishop of ublin said yesterday.

Dr Desmond Connell, speaking er a Mass at St Andrew's hurch, Dublin, said an auxiliary shop of Dublin, Dr Ray Field, d visited the girl's parents.

On speculation that the girl's ther had asked the church for nding to take an appeal to the upreme Court, Dr Connell said veral things would have to be taken into consideration in such a circumstance.

"The first obvious question is the availability of free legal aid. People should not be debarred from access to the courts because they are poor," he said.

Dr Connell also asked what the object of an appeal to the Supreme Court would be. What were they appealing? It seemed to him that one of the great weaknesses before the High Court was the court's refusal to agree to the parents' request for another opinion.

"The whole thing turned on the question of suicide and as in the X case a second opinion was not granted," he said. The refusal to allow a second opinion was incomprehensible, he said.

He thought there were two things which should remain distinct from each other. There was the crisis the girl was going through and then there was the legal issue of abortion. Unfortunately, these were inextricably mixed at present.

He was deeply concerned for the girl's welfare. From the beginning, through the travellers' parish, he had tried to give what help he could. Dr Field had visited the parents on Saturday.

Dr Connell did not think there had been any direct contact with the girl and did not know where she or her foster parents were. "I've made no attempt to make contact."

It was a crucial time as no final decision had been made on the "irrevocable act". "I would appeal out of consideration for herself and her future for calm reflection and support for this child," he said.

"There is all the difference in the world in what seems to solve the problem immediately and in the long-term considerations," Dr Connell said.

Pro-choice activists demonstrating in Dublin city centre at the weekend called on the Government to stop stalling on abortion.

Pro-choice rally for action

By Joe Humphreys

PRO-CHOICE activists have urged the Government to stop "stalling" on abortion and introduce legislation following last week's High Court decision granting a 13-year-old rape victim the right to travel to a British clinic.

About 250 demonstrators marched through Dublin city centre on Saturday, calling for the urgent legalisation of abortion in line with the Supreme Court ruling in the X case.

Speaking at the event, Ms Ivana Bacik, Reid Professor of Criminal Law and Criminology at TCD, criticised the Government's decision to have the issue dealt with by a Green Paper and a protracted consultation process. "We don't want to rush into any hasty legislative wording but we also don't want a drawn-out process which will enable the Government to avoid dealing with the issue."

She felt relief and disgust at Friday's High Court ruling in the case. "We must feel disgust that a judge said that had she not been suicidal she would not have been allowed to travel. If the judge had not thought her life was at risk she would have been locked in a legal limbo in this country."

She added: "It is not just 13-year-old suicidal rape victims who need abortions. Thousands of Irish women every year need abortions."

Ms Joan Williams, secretary of the Pro-Choice Campaign, which organised the event, said the ruling was a victory but "it shouldn't have been necessary".

It was "outrageous that this girl had two different legal teams representing her body — one for her and one for the unborn". The recently-formed campaign is planning further demonstrations in the coming months.

Another new campaign, the Dublin Abortion Rights Group, will hold a rally in the city next Saturday.

Court 'no place to resolve abortion'

By Christine Newman

THE Church of Ireland always disapproved of the Constitution as a means of dealing with an issue as complex as the case of the 13-year-old rape victim, Canon Kenneth Kearon said yesterday.

The canon, from Carrickmines parish, stressed that his statement was personal but he believed it was consistent with Church of Ireland thinking.

He was concerned that in the case, apart from those most closely involved with the victim and her family in consultation with medical, psychological and spiritual advisers, other groups were apparently attempting to influence the decision on a termination.

He said his church had always opposed abortion, and abhorred its use as an alternative to contraception or as a way of ending an unwanted pregnancy.

That said, however, it had always accepted that in exceptional cases a situation might arise where a termination might have to be an option — if, for example, it was clear that the pregnancy posed a medical threat to the mother's life or where it was clear that the foetus if born would not survive.

Canon Kearon said some in the church would also include pregnancy after rape, especially if the victim was young. It should only ever be an option, however, not automatic.

If a termination was contemplated, it should take place as early as possible in the pregnancy. No one would approve of abortion close to viability and most would set a much earlier latest date.

"With respect to the case currently before the courts in the Republic, concern would have to be expressed about the way this is being handled. We have always disapproved of the Constitution as a means of dealing with such a very complex issue," Canon Kearon said.

They had disapproved even more of the use of the courts to make such decisions in individual cases.

"If a termination is to be considered in this particular case, that decision should be taken by those most closely involved with the victim in consultation with medical, psychological and spiritual advisers who know the victim and her family well. The apparent attempt by other groups to influence that decision must be a cause for concern," he added.

Canon Kearon is a former canon of Christ Church Cathedral and an author

Father has not seen girl for six weeks

By Padraig O'Morain

THE father of the traveller girl at [illegible] abortion contro-

He also threatened legal action against the Eastern Health Board if his daughter went to England for an abortion and suffered any ad-

He said of his daughter: "She does not realise the danger of what an abortion can do to her. She doesn't realise that she's carrying a

wanted an abortion. "No, she didn't actually say she wanted an abortion. She never even mentioned [illegible]